

HR Corner

Room for improvement

by Charles Mak



Bob van den Oord
managing director
Eaton Hotel
Photo: Edde Ngan

Honest communication facilitates effective operational overhaul

Few people like to talk about why they quit work on the record. Indeed, employers more than most are inclined to paint a rosy picture of staff turnover. However, with the unprecedented changes in the regional hospitality industry, one hotel has decided to bite the bullet and confront the staffing problem.

Alongside many local hotels, Eaton Hotel recorded a high staff turnover rate last year. In order to combat such problematic staff shortages, the hotel took a bold step and implemented "Doctor R".

Forthright and pragmatic, Doctor R is a systematic approach to staff comments which are collected, analysed and acted on, all within a given time frame. "Doctor R is activated the minute a member of staff tenders his or her resignation," explains May Chan, Eaton Hotel's human resources manager. "An HR specialist then sits down with the employee in a one-on-

one interview."

Ms Chan is quick to point out that, despite all existing communication channels, staff are more willing to share their true feelings upon their departure. "This valuable feedback in turn enables us to become a better employer," she says.

Qualitative and quantitative questions crop up during the exit interview. While the former cover working environment, management style, job prospects and relationships with supervisors and colleagues; the latter relate to job nature, workload, salary, benefits and training opportunities.



May Chan (right), human
resources manager and Edward
Lo, training manager

To optimise the effectiveness of the process, all HR staff responsible for conducting exit interviews undergo specific training. "Resigning staff often express negative feelings and we must avoid making judgements and instead analyse individual cases from an objective standpoint," Ms Chan remarks.

Staff feedback obtained through the Doctor R initiative is analysed, compiled into a report and passed on to department heads, who then draft an improvement plan within three months.

"Follow-up action is reviewed in our monthly KPI (key performance indicator) meetings. In doing so we minimise the possibility of the same problem recurring," Ms Chan says. "The initiative also helps us anticipate future staff concerns."

Long-term perspective

Regarding the expected time frame for recruitment to remain a concern in the industry, Bob van den Oord, managing director, Eaton Hotel remains clear. "In light of recent difficulties in recruitment and staff

retention, which are expected to continue for some time, we must incorporate effective strategies to render Eaton a great place to work," he notes.

Eaton Hotel believes that collective effort is essential when dealing with staff turnover. "By creating a pleasant working environment, we can attract and retain staff who in turn make an effort too," Mr van den Oord emphasises. To this end, every department head at the hotel works towards six KPIs to ensure service consistency and employee accountability.

Concerning the effectiveness of Doctor R, Ms Chan stresses that exit interviews do not necessarily mean saying the final goodbye. "During the past six months, some departing staff decided to stay on because they gave us the opportunity to understand and confirm their *raison d'être* and to take remedial action," she adds.

"By creating a pleasant working environment, we can attract and retain staff"

One such remedy lies in staff learning and development, and Edward Lo, Eaton's training manager confirms this shift in employee expectations. "Some staff who opted for a career elsewhere have told us that opportunities for development training or even language training could have helped cultivate a greater sense of loyalty and job ownership," Mr Lo explains. "In response, we have a number of tailored training programmes now up and running as a result of this feedback and more are in the pipeline."

Aside from scheduled training, cross- training is also being promoted to engage staff and boost career options within the hotel. "This is an excellent retention tool," Mr Lo continues. "The reality is that certain staff considering leaving Eaton for a position elsewhere are prepared to accept a lower rank and salary to benefit from comprehensive training programmes. If we are informed of such career aspirations, we can offer cross-training to these staff to create a win-win situation."

Ms Chan agrees, "Generic training is a thing of the past," she says. "These days we must tailor training programmes to meet both departmental needs as well as the learning and development needs of every member of staff."

House doctor

- Doctor R reacts immediately to staff departures
- Private conversations explain reasons for leaving
- Comprehensive solutions to staff concerns
- Training initiatives devised in response to staff demand

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